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MIDDLE EAST PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE (MEPI)

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FY 2009 FOREIGN ASSISTANCE GOALS

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) assists efforts to broaden political participation, create opportunities for youth, strengthen civil society and the rule of law, empower women, create educational opportunities, and foster economic reform and growth throughout the Middle East and North Africa. In support of these goals, MEPI works with civil society organizations, the private sector, and academic institutions, as well as with governments. Through its Washington headquarters and regional offices in Abu Dhabi and Tunis, MEPI has contributed over $580 million to more than 600 projects in 17 countries and territories since its establishment in 2002.

MEPI furthers partnerships with citizens, especially youth, who are seeking greater opportunities in the region. MEPI projects redress deficits in the region associated with unaccountable governments, weak educational systems, inadequate government services, poor governance, and lack of political and economic opportunity. MEPI also works to strengthen the advocacy skills of individuals, especially women, lacking a full voice in society. This is done by providing leadership training, creating public-private partnerships, and developing civic engagement and networking. In its seven years, MEPI has partnered with, and helped to develop, a growing network of activists in the region who work tirelessly to tackle these challenges so that democracy can spread, education can thrive, economies can grow, and women and youth can avail themselves of greater opportunity.

MEPI has several unique values. It is nimble, and responds quickly to changes on the ground. Through its fast response time, MEPI has demonstrated its impact and has forged a direct connection between the foreign policy arm of the United States Government (USG) and local civic actors. That direct connection brings a host of benefits. For example, political reporting from the field has improved, which indicates that these relationships enhance diplomats' understanding of the societies in which they operate. In addition, MEPI has become a leading proponent of the type of change encouraged by Secretary Clinton, and a successful and compelling example of assistance delivery that is integrated by the regional bureau and in-sync with U.S. foreign policy goals for that region.

MEPI appropriations have often varied significantly from one fiscal year to the next. Appropriations averaged over $100,000,000 per year, from FY 2004 through FY 2006. The average from FY 2007 through FY 2009 was just under $50,000,000. The substantial variability of appropriation levels leads MEPI, whenever feasible, to provide its implementers at the inception of an activity with all funding needed to complete that activity, including for multiple years. Activities and corresponding results are generally achieved over a multi-year horizon.

HIGHLIGHTS BY PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

Rule of Law and Human Rights

With rare exceptions, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region remains characterized by weak judicial systems that are subject to the influence of centralized, authoritarian regimes. Limited resources available to the judicial sectors compromise their mandate and independence, including their ability to train judges properly and to develop law school curricula adequately to train and prepare a future generation of legal practitioners. This situation is perpetuated by a lack of public understanding of, and confidence in, the judiciary. Additionally, inadequate law enforcement mechanisms compromise capability to implement law in a consistent, transparent manner.

Notwithstanding the dismal macro picture, there are many promising developments reflected in growing calls for reform and judicial independence coming from within national judicial sectors. These include ministries of justice, judicial training institutes, bar associations, law schools, and civil society organizations. MEPI supports a wide range of partnerships with these institutions throughout the region, and delivers timely technical assistance, expertise, and resources through both United States and local partners.

Good Governance

In FY 2009, MEPI continued its activity in the Good Governance Program Area with civil society organizations and national institutions across the region, improving their respective competencies in monitoring government actions, providing representative services, and advancing political reform.

Across the region, MEPI has provided training to national legislatures in areas including bill drafting, legislative research, budget analysis, constituent outreach, and media relations – all of which are part of a broader regional effort to strengthen representative governance and the powers of the legislative branch. In Yemen, technical assistance enabled parliamentarians and parliamentary committees to engage civil society more effectively and promote issues of common concern. In Oman, a robust legislative strengthening and women's-empowerment project strengthened parliamentarians' constituent outreach skills and improved the ability of women's organizations to interface better with elected officials.

Political Competition and Consensus-Building

In FY 2009, across the Middle East, MEPI provided technical assistance to political parties, political groups, and local efforts to improve electoral systems and transparency. In advance of scheduled parliamentary, presidential, or municipal elections in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Kuwait, MEPI offered technical assistance to prepare a wide variety of groups and individuals for campaigning, monitoring, voter awareness efforts, and other issues. Through the involvement of citizens and civil society organizations in these efforts, MEPI has helped expand opportunities for civic engagement in the electoral process and increase the number of stakeholders in civic life.

Civil Society

FY 2009 witnessed two countervailing trends impacting civil society development in the MENA region: the positive expansion and impact of indigenous civil society organizations, and serious setbacks and threats to freedom of association, including some burdensome new regulations of civil society organizations.

In many countries in the region, including those still characterized by highly authoritarian governance, the growth of indigenous civil society organizations remains on a positive trajectory. MEPI's local grants program continued to provide direct support to organizations in the MENA region in FY 2009. These awards have helped to strengthen the sustainability and capacity of those that serve as the region's most dedicated and successful agents of change.

MEPI-supported organizations have worked to articulate a reform platform that focuses on voter education, women's political empowerment, election monitoring, transparency, and freedom of expression and association, among other issues. This agenda for reform is unquestionably rooted in local priorities, as these organizations increasingly appreciate their roles and responsibilities in impacting the path of political reform in their home countries. Indeed, the issue-focus and geographic mandate of these organizations continue to expand in reach and sophistication.

Education

One-third of MENA's population is under the age of 15. Within the next 15 years, these children and adolescents will complete their education and enter the job market and political arena. Without educational systems capable of providing youth with the knowledge and skills needed to become articulate, engaged, and productive members of society, the region will continue to be marked by limited economic prospects, high unemployment, and illiteracy, and even less innovation and capital investment.

The recognition that changes in education are needed – at both the basic and higher education levels – is not new. For many years, the people and governments of the region, with assistance from the USG and other donors, have addressed education challenges with sustainable interventions. In fact, there have been successful "case studies" with the potential for replicability, which have served as models for continued and expanded progress. Time is increasingly of the essence, however, as the challenge to address the deficiencies found in education is exacerbated by the region's rapid population growth. President Obama's clarion call for partnerships invested in education underscored the urgent nature of the task at hand, and provides impetus for the way forward.

Basic Education

In FY 2009, MEPI's basic education initiative emphasized critical issues such as curriculum revision, teacher training, and technology readiness, with an emphasis on practical experience and hands-on application of techniques by students and teachers. MEPI worked in partnership with governments, schools, communities, and non-governmental organizations, and placed specific emphasis on introducing concepts and solutions. These concepts and tools have been readily transferred to host-country owners, who must ultimately have responsibility and management for the education system and policy reforms.

Higher Education

MEPI recognizes that institutions of higher education play a critical role in contributing to broader human development efforts. Education is a priority for the Obama Administration, and the President has called for an increased emphasis on building partnerships through expanding

exchanges and increasing scholarship opportunities for students from this region. MEPI worked toward these goals during FY 2009 by promoting professional development opportunities, institutional linkages, enhanced capacities, and scholarships.

Youth

MEPI recognized in FY 2009 that young people seek a wide range of opportunities to participate in the political, economic, and social development of their countries. MEPI worked to empower youth and the adults who serve them through projects that help young people become actively engaged citizens, obtain a quality education, gain employable skills, and access professional development opportunities.

Civic education projects and training in leadership and advocacy skills empowered youth to promote change in their communities and to undertake civic duties and responsibilities. MEPI projects in this area encouraged active youth participation at the community level. MEPI scholarship opportunities, career development initiatives, and education-for-employment projects supported the integration of young people as contributing members to their societies. Finally, MEPI's professional development projects for youth focused on promoting skills that lead to jobs and opportunity. Through teacher training, curriculum improvements, and technology skills development, youth acquire the expertise they need to compete in today's changing social, political, and economic arenas.

Gender

MEPI strongly supported projects aimed at increasing gender equity throughout the Middle East and North Africa in FY 2009, particularly in the areas of women's rights, legal advocacy and training, political representation, and women's economic empowerment. Through innovative and effective program development tied to broader Bureau and individual Mission strategies, MEPI's support to increasing gender equity is part of many MEPI projects. MEPI also took a multifaceted approach in FY 2009 to addressing the issues of sexual and gender-based violence through local projects that focused on prevention, the holistic treatment of survivors, and training for judicial personnel.

Trade and Investment

MEPI economic projects build trade capacity by providing technical assistance to assist countries in complying with obligations on intellectual property, agriculture standards, customs policy, labor standards, and environmental management. MEPI has delivered technical assistance in this area through USG agencies, volunteer organizations, and consulting firms.

MEPI addresses trade reform though facilitation of the region's integration into the global marketplace and the promotion of citizen participation in the democratic process. In FY 2009, MEPI helped to advance greater transparency and an improved business climate by promoting trade agreements that require governments to institute public notice and comment systems for all laws, regulations, procedures, and administrative rulings covered during negotiations.

Financial Sector

Financial sector reforms in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa have decentralized banking and fostered entrepreneurship by stimulating the flow of credit to small- and medium-sized enterprises during FY 2009. MEPI implementing partners worked primarily with the commercial banking sector to encourage greater lending and other financial services to small businesses. This was done with the aim of enabling them to assume a larger role in generating employment and economic growth.

Private Sector Competitiveness

MEPI's economic projects enhanced private sector competitiveness through a wide variety of approaches. These approaches have included rewriting commercial laws to liberalize economies, reforming labor laws to allow labor to organize freely, creating jobs and new businesses, and establishing a foundation for future gross domestic product growth across the Middle East and North Africa.

During FY 2009, MEPI-designed strategic programs and technical assistance fostered region-wide economic and employment growth, driven by private sector expansion. MEPI, working closely with regional stakeholders, achieved this goal by focusing on investment policy development, entrepreneurship training, and commercial law reform. Specifically, MEPI's projects advanced private sector job creation, enhanced the global competitiveness of the countries of the region, and encouraged the mobilization of direct foreign and domestic investment.